CIHR– INSTITUTE OF POPULATION & PUBLIC HEALTH

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Message from the Scientific Director

Public Health in Canada is, as you know, more "in the news" than at anytime in decades. Of course, the news is not all good -- "Cough, buzz, moo -- annus horribilis for Canada," as Globe columnist Margaret Wente wrote last month. But the opportunity has, through these events, has presented us all with an opportunity to advocate for enhanced public health services -- at least in English Canada (Quebec may already have one of the best public health systems in the world) -- to respond not only to acute infectious disease outbreaks, but also emerging "insidious epidemics," such as obesity and Type II diabetes, and asthma.

The Institute has recently led a ten-month effort to document, via international comparisons of infrastructure and funding arrangements for public health, "best practices" for ensuring that such services are ready and able to deal with these new threats to the health of the public. In Calgary on May 10th, just before the annual Canadian Public Health Association meeting, about 60 health experts deliberated a report on these issues, prepared by consultant Dr. Brent Moloughney, and Institute staff, under the guidance of a Steering Committee of two-dozen national public health practitioners. [Frank and Di Ruggiero describe the full rationale for these efforts in an editorial – June issue, Canadian Journal of Public Health.] The outcome of the Calgary meeting was just as the Institute had hoped: a new Coalition to press for improved public health organizational structures, and funding, was formed involving the CPHA, many non-governmental organizations, voluntary health charities, professional societies, First Nations, and labour unions. They will all work together with federal, provincial and territorial government authorities to strengthen Canada's "front-line" against new challenges to our health.

In the process, the IPPH hopes that more evidence-based policy and practice will emerge as a result of these reforms, and we will do our part not only to fund research appropriate for informing that policy and practice, but also catalyzing its utilization by those on the front lines.

John Frank,
Scientific Director

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Networking at the Canadian Public Health Association Conference (May 2003, Calgary)

From Left to Right: **Back Row** – Trevor Hancock, Erica Di Ruggiero, John Frank. **Front Row** – Margaret Hilson, Christina Mills, Marcia Hills.

CIHR IRSC

Closing the Gap: Needs, Gaps and Opportunities Assessment of Communicable and Infectious Disease Research in British Columbia

Communicable and infectious disease remains an area of long-term, vital public health concern at both the regional and national levels. This is important as many new communicable diseases are emerging, previously controlled diseases are re-emerging because of drug resistance, and bioterrorism is an urgent threat. Moreover, our current attempts to deal with such public health issues as SARS, the West Nile Virus and BSE (or, "mad-cow disease") dramatically highlights the pressing need for research that unites both the interest of researchers and practitioners of infectious disease control and prevention. Developing a research agenda that guides public health policy and programs is the essential challenge for control and prevention of communicable and infectious disease in the 21st century.

In 2002, members of the University of British Columbia Centre for Disease Control conducted a review of current communicable and infectious disease research activity and capacity in British Columbia, as well as an identification and prioritization of needs, gaps, and research opportunities. The purpose of the study was to identify priorities for communicable and infectious disease research, with the aim of informing a forward-looking research agenda and supporting infrastructure. The study was organized in three phases that included an environmental scan to describe current research activity in BC, a consultation to identify the needs, gaps and opportunities with both researchers and research users, and a prioritization of the research needs emerging from the consultation. Participants in the study represented a broad range of Regional Health Authorities, health care professionals, and areas of communicable and infectious disease research and practice. A total of 99 stakeholders and key informants from across BC participated in the consultations, and 125 people completed a web-based prioritization exercise. Key findings of the study include:

- Participant identification that a need exists for more multi-disciplinary, multi-level research collaborations. Currently, there are few linkages among investigators, corporations, and public health to foster and/or facilitate interaction and synergies that could lead to a shared agenda.
- The BC communicable and infectious disease research needs, gaps, and priorities closely parallel those identified for population and public health research in general by the CIHR-Institute of Population and Public Health and the CIHI-Canadian Population Health Initiative in their national consultation document, *Charting the Course:* available online at —
  URL: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/institutes/ipph/publications/index_e.shtml

This issue of research provided a common ground on which a diverse group of population and public health practitioners and scientists could come together to meet, provide input, dialogue and network. The participants united to identify nine emerging research themes that are ranked as follows: *1)Efficacy/ Cost Benefit/Best Practice Research, 2)Disease Patterns Research, 3)Emerging Communicable and Infectious Disease Research, 4)Immunology and Vaccine Research, 5)Disease Specific Research, 6)Social Marketing/Target Messages Research, 7)Enterics Research, 8)Knowledge Translation Research, and 9) Genomics Research.* Moreover, it is interesting to note that these emerging research themes cover the gamut of CIHR's four pillars of research from basic biomedical (genomics research) to population and public health aspects of emerging communicable and infectious disease research. Further NGOA studies would be useful on a national scale – they could be valuable in identifying local needs, and give voice to public health practitioners.

For additional information, please contact Dr. Robert C. Brunham, Team Leader, at <Robert.brunham@bccdc.ca> or visit the web site of the University of British Columbia Centre for Disease Control at —
URL: http://www.cdc.ubc.ca

Building Sustainable Public Health Research Infrastructure in Canada

The Institute of Population and Public Health (IPPH) demonstrated its commitment to strengthening population and public health research capacity by hosting an invitational meeting on "Building Sustainable Public Health Research Infrastructure in Canada." This initiative responded to a recommendation from the CIHR-IPPH sponsored "Building Public Health Research, Education and Development in Canada: A Five Site Consultation" (July 2002, accessible on the web at "http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/institutes/ipph/publications/indes_e.shtml"), and was envisioned as one part of an ongoing conversation about public health research capacity in Canada. Eighty public health opinion leaders from research, practice, community and policy-making arenas across Canada came together on March 3-4, 2003 in Toronto to talk about population and public health research. The goals of the meeting were:

- To facilitate the development of a network and infrastructure for public health researchers, practitioners, community advocates and policy makers in Canada.
- To develop recommendations and an action plan to foster public health research infrastructure development in Canada.

The participants were invited because of their experience and/or interest in collaborative public health research from research, community, practice or government perspectives. In preparation for a series of structured discussions planned for the two-day meeting, they were given 1-2 page background information about various existing models (SEARCH, PHRED, Montreal Public Health, ACADRE, Community Campus Partnerships, CIHR Centres for Research Development, Skills Enhancement for Health Surveillance Program) The participants were then able to focus on how to build collaborative research infrastructure(s) that transcend or integrate the various jurisdictional and organizational structures in which they currently work.

A keynote presentation by Dr. Louise Potvin and two panels of speakers served to stimulate the conversations that ensued. The recommendations offered by the participants are far-ranging and directed at a variety of individuals, groups and organizations in addition to CIHR-IPPH. The ongoing process required to build such an infrastructure is ambitious and will take time and energy as well as resources. The meeting has provided a starting point, from which to further define and advance the conversation. It is hoped that meeting participants along with many other colleagues will build on the ideas that were articulated at the meeting. The proceedings will be available on the CIHR-IPPH website this summer.

Submitted by: Jane Underwood, Consultant – Underwood & Associates – on behalf of the Public Health Research Infrastructure Advisory Committee.

Recently Funded Initiatives in 2003

The following three strategic funding decisions were made by CIHR in 2003:

Global Health Research Program Development and Planning Grants
This RFA was designed to provide research program development and planning grants to build research capacity in Canada to investigate and intervene on ecological, technological, economic, political and socio-cultural forces that influence health, and/or major health and health systems problems that affect low, middle income and rich countries. A total of 71 applications were received, of which 31 were funded. For more information, please visit the web site at: "http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/publicaitons/funding/decisions/2003/200210glh_e.shtml".

Understanding and Addressing the Impacts of Physical and Social Environments on Health
This strategic initiative was designed to build research capacity to understand and address the impacts of physical and social environments on health. A total of 16 applications were received, of which 8 were funded. For more information, please visit the web site at: "http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/publications/funding/decisions/2003/200210ips_e.shtml".

Reducing Health Disparities & Promoting Equity for Vulnerable Populations
This RFA was designed to build research capacity that assesses and reduces health disparities and promotes equity for vulnerable populations. A total of 43 applications were received, of which 13 were approved. For more information, please visit the web site at: "http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/publications/funding/decisions/2003/200210hdp_e.shtml".

Housing as a Socio-Economic Determinant of Health

In an effort to develop research to enhance understanding of the effects of social and physical environments on the health of Canadians, CIHR-IPPH funded a Needs, Gaps and Opportunities Assessment (NGOA) of research on *Housing as a Socio-Economic Determinant of Health*. In addition to its intrinsic importance, the issue of *socio-economic* dimensions of housing and their impact on health is an important area of study as it generally receives limited attention in research circles. Whereas there is considerable concentration of activity on the *biophysical* aspects of housing and health, as well as the impact of homelessness on health, there exists a dearth of current research emphasis in Canada on the issue of *housing as a socio-economic determinant of health*.

An interdisciplinary team of researchers, in partnership with the National Housing Research Committee (NHRC) and the Canadian Housing Renewal Association (CHRA), conducted a national stakeholder consultation to identify needs, gaps and opportunities in the area of housing as a socio-economic determinant of health. This consultation took the form of an electronic questionnaire and eight, one-day regional workshops across Canada, in Vancouver, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. Participants included people and organizations in the housing sector, the health sector and those at the interface of the two. It included academic researchers, government policy and research staff at all levels, and people working in government and non-governmental organizations involved in the delivery of both housing and health initiatives.

The interdisciplinary team of investigators was comprised of Dr. James Dunn (University of Calgary), Dr. Michael Hayes (Simon Fraser University), Dr. David Hulchanski (University of Toronto), Dr. Stephen Hwang (St. Michael's Hospital) and Dr. Louise Potvin (Université de Montréal). At the outset of each workshop, the team identified seven dimensions of housing as potentially influential factors on health: physical hazards, physical design, social dimensions of housing, psychological dimensions of housing, political dimensions of housing, financial dimensions of housing and location. Moreover, they added that dimensions would have different impacts on the lines that define different population sub-groups, including: homeowners/renters, life-cycle stages (seniors, children), gender, ethnicity/immigration, chronic illness (especially mental illness), (dis) ability, aboriginal status, and family/household structure.

Some of the key outcomes of the NGOA include:

- The need to directly evaluate the health impact of housing interventions, especially for vulnerable sub-groups (e.g., people with mental illness or disabilities).
- The need to assess the cost-effectiveness of housing, especially as it impacts the health care system.
- The need to study the impact that housing interventions, especially those focused on socio-economic dimensions of housing (e.g., affordability, stability) may have on the health and development of children, low-income families, seniors, immigrants and Aboriginal peoples.

Housing is an issue of great importance that touches the lives of all Canadians in some fashion; this and a host of other factors underscore its potential for improving the health of Canadians. The results of the Needs, Gaps and Opportunities Assessment (NGOA) indicate that there is considerable potential for development of research opportunities in the area of housing as a socio-economic determinant of health. However, the dearth of research capacity in this area in Canada – both in terms of capacity to do research and to use research – suggests that there is a strong need for investment in research capacity in order to take full advantage of the many opportunities identified in the NGOA.

For additional information, please see: "www.housingandhealth.ca" and/or contact Dr. James Dunn, Team Leader, at the University of Calgary, Department of Community Health Sciences at : jimdunn@ucalgary.ca

Summer Institute 2003

In June 2002, the CIHR-Institute of Population and Public Health held their Inaugural Summer Institute in Kimberley, Ontario. Following the success of the first Summer Institute, the Institutes of Population & Public Health (IPPH) and Health Services & Policy Research (IHSPR) collaborated with the Québec Population Health Research Network (PHR) and the Fonds de Recherche en Santé du Québec (FRSQ) to implement the 2003 Summer Institute in an effort to strengthen the capacity of the next generation of health researchers in population and public health research and health services and policy research.

The event, open to doctoral and post-doctoral students, took place in Val David Quebec from June 3 – 8, 2003. Fifty students (25 from Québec and 25 from other provinces across Canada) participated in this Summer Institute. Look for a report on the 2003 Summer Institute, including information about future such events, in an upcoming issues of *POP News*.

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IPPH Funding Opportunities

IPPH is pleased to announce the following upcoming funding opportunities:

Public Health and Health Care System Preparedness and Response to-Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS): Evaluation and Lessons Learned RFA
Launched : June 11, 2003
Deadline : September 1, 2003
URL: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/services/funding/opportunities/institutes/2003/rfa_sars_e.shtml

Global Health Research Pilot Project Grants
Launch Date: June 23, 2003
Registration deadline : September 15, 2003

Reducing Health Disparities & Promoting Equity for Vulnerable Populations co-led with the CIHR-Institute of Gender and Health. Two funding tools will be offered as part of this initiative:
1) Research Program Development, and
2) Pilot Project Grants
Launch Date: June 23, 2003
Registration deadline: August 15, 2003

For more information about these funding opportunities, or to view the Request for Applications, please visit, by the end of June —
URL: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/services/funding/opportunities/institutes/2003/rfa_2003_summary_e.shtml

IPPH Publications

The following Publications are available in both print and electronic form. To download a **.pdf** or **.html** file of these documents, please visit our website at —
URL: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/intitutes/ipph/publications/index_e.shtml

Mapping and Tapping the Wellsprings of Health, Strategic Plan 2002-2007

Mapping and Tapping the Wellsprings of Health, Executive Summary 2002-2007

Institute of Population and Public Health Annual Report, January 2001-March 2002

Charting the Course

Building Public Health Research, Education and Development in Canada: A Five-Site Consultation

Pop News, Issue 1, January 2003